

Carroll County Times

County sees drop in deaths from heart disease, diabetes

By Erica Kritt, Times Staff Writer

Over the past decade, there has been a significant effort by Carroll health officials to set health goals and then achieve them.

These goals include reducing the number of deaths caused by heart disease, making information available on cancer and diabetes and decreasing smoking.

Barb Rodgers, the director of health planning and community improvement at the Carroll County Health Department, said that during the past 10 years there has been an increase in the amount of local data available to her and the Health Department, and they've benefited from the creation of the Partnership for a Healthier Carroll County.

The Partnership was begun in 1999 as a joint venture between Carroll Hospital Center and the Carroll County Health Department.

The nonprofit gathers members of society to study different health aspects in the county and to come up with programming and studies to meet health goals.

The Partnership has formed several groups and created surveys, made studies and offered recommendations. In a report on the county's health progress in 2008, the Partnership stated that overall Carroll County is in good health, but there are still areas of concern and areas that need to be studied.

Tricia Supik, executive director of the Partnership, still stands by the fact that the community is healthy. Aside from general health, she sites the active programs available to youth and the caring nature of the county's residents.

"We have a history of caring about each other," she said.

Healthwise, Supik said one of the biggest accomplishments this decade was the banning of smoking in bars and restaurants.

Tobacco use is considered by the health community, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to be the No. 1 behavior that leads to death. Second is poor diet and inactivity.

She said that the quality of health-care services has also improved dramatically. She said there are now more facilities and health-care workers to make it easier for Carroll residents to get treatment without traveling outside of the county.

With the newly expanded data, Rodgers said she and other health-care workers in the county can better understand the needs of the county's residents and help them formulate the best programs or policies to help meet the target goals.

For instance, Rodgers noted a program on kick counting that was developed to make expecting mothers more aware of their babies' movements in the womb. The program came out of meetings about infant deaths, focusing on ways they could be prevented.

Rodgers said this makes mothers more aware of their babies. The mother can alert her doctor if she doesn't notice movement or notices irregular movement.

Rodgers said the data also helps them find out if the programs they have in place are working. She said the Health Department reviews data annually before creating a plan for the upcoming year.

Rodgers compared the death rates from 2000 to 2007 for certain diseases or complications and found that there has been a decrease in deaths related to diseases of the heart and deaths related to chronic lower respiratory diseases and diabetes.

She said this lowered death rate can be the direct result of getting more communication out to the public about heart health, along with legislation to curtail smoking in bars and restaurants.

Health-related statistics that have not improved include deaths related to cancer, stroke and accidents.

While she said she doesn't know why the cancer rate has increased, she said it could be related to people's lifestyles.

Rodgers said the county has a good rate of having cancer screenings, but not a great rate. She said this will be one of the things they look into, to determine how to decrease the rates, along with studying specific rates for specific cancers.

Rodgers also included injury control, maternal and child health and emergency preparedness as issues that will need to be studied in the future.

Supik said the county's No. 1 challenge in the next decade will be becoming active.

"We are too sedentary," she said. "We have to work harder to be active."

In the next year the CDC will come up with benchmarks, in a document called Healthy People 2020. They will be applied to Maryland and then to Carroll County, to help guide the county to progress along with the nation.

The Healthy People 2020 objectives are still in the planning process, but some of the proposed goals will include decreasing deaths from diseases, increasing the proportion of quality Web sites on health and increasing the number of blood donors.

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